

Family violence • Watch out for coercive control too

Coercive control behaviours can be defined as a range of acts designed to make a person or subordinate dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

It also typically involves a continuing pattern of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation. This includes abuse that is intended to harm, punish, dominate or frighten the victim.

At Care Corner Singapore, we have worked with victims who experienced coercive control violence. This is a subtle kind of violence – one that is beyond the commonly known actions such as physical harm, explicit threats of harm or the use of derogatory comments.

It could include acts of gaslighting where perpetrators manipulate victims to question

their own reality and sanity.

An example would be a victim spending considerable effort to hide from the perpetrator, who then sends a bouquet of flowers to her, subtly “informing” the victim that he now knows her address.

When dealing with family violence, social workers and counsellors are trained to identify signs of abuse, which include coercive control.

Currently, existing legislation broadly covers the key behaviours of violence, including physical and sexual violence, psychological and emotional harm, wrongful confinement, threats, harassment, and stalking behaviours.

While these types of violence include aspects of coercive control, the law alone cannot fully address situations involving coercive control that appear harmless on the surface.

Family violence behaviours have changed.

Society should not identify

family violence based solely on the actions of abusers. Instead, we should take reference from how the World Health Organisation defines violence in its World Report On Violence And Health.

According to the report, violence is defined as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”.

Hence, the Taskforce on Family Violence, which Care Corner is part of, has recommended steps to help strengthen detection and treatment of all kinds of family violence cases by developing a standardised assessment framework and upskilling police officers to specialise in investigating and handling all forms of family violence.

The task force has also recommended increasing

awareness of family violence through public communications campaigns and equipping community partners to better detect all forms of family violence, including non-physical forms of abuse.

We must go back to the heart of combating family violence – to ensure that the home is a safe place, free from all types of abuse and violence.

Agnes Chia

Chief Service Officer
Care Corner Singapore

This is a subtle kind of violence – one that is beyond the commonly known actions such as physical harm, explicit threats of harm or the use of derogatory comments.